

## Guidance for Determining Eligibility for Alternate Curriculum and Alternate Assessment

### *Purpose*

This document provides general guidance to the campus-based ARD/IEP Committee on how to determine which students with cognitive disabilities are eligible to participate in Houston ISD's alternate curriculum and the state's alternate assessment. Houston ISD implements the Unique Learning System (ULS) for students with significant cognitive disabilities. The ULS is aligned with alternate state standards and the alternate assessment, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness – Alternate (STAAR-Alternate 2).

### *Background*

Students with disabilities are part of the state and federal accountability systems that measures proficiency, progress, closing the achievement gap, and college/career readiness. Students also participate in local, national, and international assessments.

The newly signed Every Student Succeeds Act places a cap of 1% of all students assessed for participation in the alternate assessment aligned with alternate achievement standards. This equates to about 10% of students with disabilities.

In Houston ISD, over the past three school years, the number of students with disabilities participating in the alternate assessment has steadily increased to **17.9%, well above the state and federal target of 10%**, and students with cognitive disabilities continue to be served overwhelmingly, in separate instructional settings for more than 60% of the school day.

### *Implications of Participation in Alternate Curriculum and Assessment*

When choosing an appropriate assessment for a student, an important consideration is that students who participate in an alternate assessment may have limited post-secondary opportunities upon graduating high school. Their options for attending the college of their choice or seeking gainful employment may get narrower.

### *Considerations for Eligibility to Participate in the Alternate Curriculum and Assessment*

The ARD/IEP Committee must thoroughly review the assurances in the [STAAR Alternate 2 Participation Requirements](#) document. This review ensures that the decision to administer STAAR Alternate 2 is based on the educational needs of the student.

Here are additional considerations for determining participation in the ULS and STAAR-Alternate 2:

- Rely on the student's **strengths** and **needs** to better inform placement, not their disability category.
- Confirm that the student exhibits a **full scale IQ and two areas of Adaptive Behavior** below 60.
- Verify that the student **requires extensive support to access the general curriculum** in a variety of settings that includes assistance with communication, response style, physical access or daily living skills.
- **Carefully review** the student's most recent Full and Individual Evaluation (FIE), Present Levels of Academic and Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP), and IEP goals and objectives.
- Ensure that the student **routinely demonstrates** knowledge and skills by methods other than paper-and-pencil tasks.
- **Confirm** that the student demonstrates a significant cognitive disability that prevents the student from accessing the standard curriculum with accommodations, supplemental supports, and adaptations.

Prior to finalizing decision about a student's eligibility to participate in the alternate curriculum and assessment, review the [Worksheet for Determining the Need for Participation in the Alternate Curriculum](#).